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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 002334

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#) [KS](#)  
SUBJECT: ROK PRESIDENT LEE VISITS BEIJING; AGREES TO  
"UPGRADE" BILATERAL RELATIONS

REF: BEIJING 2030

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Ben Moeling. Reason  
s 1.4 (b/d).

#### Summary

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¶1. (C) South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and PRC President Hu Jintao, during Lee's May 27-30 visit to China, agreed to "upgrade" bilateral relations to a "strategic cooperative partnership," China's highest category of bilateral relations. An ROK Embassy official, however, dismissed the "upgrade" as a Chinese proposal that will have no meaningful impact on bilateral ties. The two leaders agreed to increase cooperation on political and economic issues, and described China-ROK-Japan cooperation as essential to regional peace and stability. Both sides applauded the progress on the North Korean nuclear issue to date and confirmed their resolve to complete the Second Phase and begin discussion of the Third Phase. Lee also met with Premier Wen Jiabao and Chairman of the People's Political Consultative Conference Jia Qinglin before traveling to Qingdao to meet with South Korean businessmen. Lee finished his trip with a visit to earthquake-devastated Sichuan Province. End Summary.

¶2. (C) MFA Asian Affairs Department DPRK, ROK and Mongolia Division Deputy Director Fang Kun briefed PolOff June 6 on ROK President Lee Myung-bak's May 27-30 visit to China. Fang pointed out that while Lee's first overseas visits as ROK President were to Japan and the United States, these visits, unlike his visit to China, were not "State-level visits." While in Beijing, Fang said, President Lee met with President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and Chairman of the People's Political Consultative Conference Jia Qinglin.

#### Relationship Upgrade

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¶3. (C) According to Fang, President Lee expressed to President Hu China's importance to South Korean foreign policy. Both agreed to "upgrade" bilateral relations from their existing "comprehensive and cooperative partnership" to a "strategic cooperative partnership," which Fang described as China's highest level of bilateral relations. In addition to establishing "senior level dialogues" for Foreign Ministry officials, Lee and Hu agreed to increase bilateral exchanges in the foreign policy, security, trade and cultural fields. Lee and Hu also committed to seeking a greater understanding of each other's positions regarding East China Sea disputes. In a Joint Statement issued following Lee's official meetings, the two sides welcomed the establishment of a ROK Consulate in Wuhan, agreed that China-ROK-Japan cooperation is essential to regional peace and stability and agreed to study the possibility of a ROK-China free trade area.

14. (C) ROK Embassy First Secretary Lee Heon told us separately on June 13 that the decision to "upgrade" bilateral relations was a Chinese initiative that will have no meaningful impact on existing bilateral ties. "It's a wooden box with no contents," he stated, saying China and the ROK already engage in meaningful dialogue on a wide-range of issues. China has "strategic cooperative partnerships" with 17 nations, Lee said, and Beijing's decision to upgrade its ties with Seoul should not be seen as a significant development.

15. (C) Fang reported that President Hu told President Lee that China hopes for improved North-South relations and continued forward momentum in the Six-Party Talks. Hu said China is willing to help North Korea improve its relations with other countries. He described close China-DPRK relations as beneficial to peace and stability in the region. In response to Lee's comment on the importance of the Six-Party Talks, Fang said, Hu noted that China views favorably the progress to date in the talks and looks forward to completion of the Second Phase and the start of discussions on the Third Phase.

16. (C) Fang said Lee's meetings with Premier Wen and Chairman Jia covered the same issues as Lee's meeting with President Hu. Fang said Hu told Lee that it was unfortunate that other high-level Chinese officials were unable to meet Lee because of PRC earthquake recovery efforts. Following his meetings in Beijing, Lee traveled to Qingdao, where he visited South Korean companies, before continuing to Chengdu. According to

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Fang, the ROK has contributed over USD 3 million in aid, approximately USD 500,000 in cash and the remainder in tents and medical supplies. The ROK Government has also pledged an additional USD 2 million in assistance, he said, noting that South Korean businesses and citizens contributed over USD 30 million. South Korea dispatched 47 medical and rescue personnel to the earthquake region, Fang commented. ROK Embassy First Secretary Lee said President Lee's decision to visit Sichuan Province was a gesture the Chinese particularly appreciated.

Alliance Comments

17. (C) First Secretary Lee noted that the Chinese MFA spokesperson's May 27 public comment (reftel) describing the U.S.-ROK military alliance as a "left over from history," took the ROK delegation by surprise. The ROK Embassy complained to the MFA, Lee said, and the MFA apologized for the remark.

VP Xi Jinping Headed North

18. (C) Fang confirmed that Vice President Xi Jinping will travel to North Korea on June 19. He said the visit is part of five-country trip that was planned in March. There is no significance to North Korea being the first stop, Fang said, referring to the visit as a "courtesy visit to a close neighbor." He explained that it is "geographically convenient" for VP Xi to visit North Korea before continuing to Mongolia, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Qatar. Although Fang said Xi's visit is not related to the Six-Party Talks, Xi will stress to DPRK officials the Chinese hope for continued progress in the Six-Party Talks, including completion of Phase II and the start of discussions on Phase III. Xi will also elicit North Korean views on the current status of the talks, said Fang.

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